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Please visit our embassy web-page for more information at:

<http://bangkok.usembassy.gov/embassy/reo.htm>

**REO Highlights**

**Life Sciences Innovation Conference**

On June 26, the REO team kicked off the much anticipated Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) Life Sciences Innovation Conference, having spent several months pulling together a field of experts for the event in Chiang Mai. The Bangkok REO, U.S. Consulate in Chiang Mai, and partners from Chiang Mai University teamed up to promote a dialogue on innovation in the medical biotech, agricultural biotech, and medical systems fields. Ambassador Kristie Kenney delivered the welcome address stressing the importance of continued scientific exchanges between the U.S., Thailand, as well as the broader region. Those in attendance included high-level government officials like the governor of Chiang Mai, academics, industry experts, and community stakeholders—providing an excellent venue for discussing innovative cluster development strategies for Chiang Mai. Many participants reiterated the importance and incredible opportunity of having representation from all these sectors brainstorming about concrete action plans to turn Chiang Mai into a hub of innovation.

To meet the goal of continued discussion while maintaining a diversity of experience and expertise, participants suggested forming a working group to implement the conference's deliverables and formulate next steps. Among these deliverables, the group plans to collaborate with government and private sector networks on the development of a planned northern region science park to facilitate private sector research and develop, offer matching grants, and support product marketing. The new working group will also seek to maintain momentum of implementing IBM's Smarter City roadmap, which seeks to develop Chiang

Mai as a regional medical and agricultural hub.

The agricultural biotech group focused on developing Chiang Mai as a regional agricultural hub proposing new efforts to apply the latest technologies for more efficient agricultural development, ramp up seed production, increase research of the versatile longan fruit and other novel crops, and explore the application of agricultural waste for bio-energy and microbial biotechnology. The medical biotechnology group proposed initiatives to facilitate innovative new business models, promote intellectual property rights, and develop a flagship project in the next 3-5 years to enhance government-academia-business partnerships. Members of the medical systems group advocated for developing a center of excellence in medical training in Chiang Mai to serve the lower Mekong sub-region.

The REO team was happy to facilitate convening these key players in these pillars of technological development and looks forward to reporting on the fruits of the connections made in Chiang Mai.



Above: Ambassador Kenney with conference speakers.



Left: Panelists discuss building innovative clusters in Chiang Mai

Learn more about the conference at:  
<http://www.creativechiangmai.com/en/lifesciencesinnovation2012/> &  
[http://www.chiangmaicamber.com/newsdetail.php?id\\_news=585](http://www.chiangmaicamber.com/newsdetail.php?id_news=585)

## Donors Discuss Damming the Mekong

The Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) and the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS) co-organized a seminar on the ramifications of damming the Mekong River on June 6 in Bangkok, Thailand. The seminar focused on topics such as new development financiers, civil society, and climate change in the Mekong region. Two Danish researchers from DIIS, Kurt Mørck Jensen and Rane Baadsgaard Lange, presented their preliminary findings from research on the Mekong and the Zambezi Rivers that included the topics listed above. In addition to the members from SEI and DIIS, Rick Switzer, Regional ESTH Officer, was one of four panelists involved in the discussion.

The seminar focused on how the private sector is driving development on the Mekong and the resulting governance and environmental consequences. It was noted that existing mechanisms for cooperation such as the Mekong River Commission are being challenged by strong national interests in the economic realm from hydropower investments. Participants also raised their concerns over building dams on the mainstream Mekong River, such as the proposed Xayaburi Dam, in Laos, and the potential negative impacts of such projects.

The Xayaburi dam is being constructed on the Laotian stretch of the river's main stream by a private Thai developer and will be financed by Thai banks. The project has drawn much attention in the region and internationally, not least because of its symbolic importance. Downstream countries, Cambodia and Vietnam, are concerned about the dam's impact on fish migration and sedimentation. In spite of impact studies suggesting considerable reduction in fish stock particularly in Cambodia and sedimentation changes that could seriously affect agricultural production and livelihoods in the Mekong Delta in Vietnam, the project appears to be ahead of schedule. Additional impact studies are planned by Vietnam and the Mekong River Commission to scientifically assess the scale of dam's effects. The hope is that these studies could pave the way for negotiations between Lower Mekong countries on trade-offs and benefit sharing.

The seminar continued discussion on many topics related to the developing events around the Mekong main stream dams including the political economy of water, the role of energy in the emerging economies, the role of civil society, climate change, the Mekong River

Commission, and changing geopolitics in the region. Rick Switzer presented views on the East Asian developmental state model, which is driving the economies in the region with high priority given to GDP growth and low priority to environmental and social costs. The challenge for donors, academia and international organizations is to constructively engage in this development discourse and suggest alternatives. Establishing a dialogue on sustainable energy development and security could be a way forward.

To learn more about this seminar or the work of SEI and DIIS, please visit: [www.sei-international.org](http://www.sei-international.org) and [www.diis.dk](http://www.diis.dk)



*Seminar Participants (Photo by Kurt Mørck Jensen)*

## REO Site Visit to Grantee in Borneo

On June 1, members of the REO team traveled to Borneo, Malaysia to visit grantees working on a watershed restoration project. Project Women Empowerment Trees (PWET) is an indigenous women's watershed restoration, organic gardening, microenterprise, and empowerment program. The funds for the project are managed by LEAP, a non-profit organization registered in the U.S. and Malaysia.

This watershed restoration project was driven by the infestation of acacia trees in the Eastern region of Borneo. As heavy deforestation occurred in the 1960's and 1970's in Borneo, acacia trees were introduced to revive the landscape. However, this type of tree has proven to be devastating to the land and local communities where they were planted. These types of trees have also distorted the livelihoods and watersheds in the region forcing some in the community to relocate. However, PWET is fighting back and taking action to change this series of events and restore the ecosystem.

The REO grant funds PWET to re-plant trees indigenous to the area. In order to restore a healthy watershed, the women also have to simultaneously clear invasive acacia trees through girdling, or cutting rings around the tree to disrupt the flow of water and nutrients. The removal of acacia trees enhances the quality of the watershed because it improves the moisture retention of the soil and clears space for the indigenous trees, which are normally shaded by the acacia trees. After years of hard work, the watershed ecosystems are showing signs of improvement, such as the return of sambar deer and mouse deer, which are foraging on previously planted indigenous saplings.

While on the site visit, REO team members were able to visit with the staff from PWET and LEAP to learn more about the watershed restoration project and to observe the USG-funded program. The visit included lunch with the women that undertake the tree planting and a visit to tree nursery and watershed.

For more information on PWET, visit: <http://www.leapspiral.org/content/project12.php>



*Above: PWET community leaders with Katie Yates from the REO Team*



*Above: Watershed restoration project*



*Left: PWET member working on traditional handicrafts*



**ASEAN+3 Field Epidemiology Training Network**  
**Severe Flood Surveillance, Response and Policy Recommendations Workshop**

The ASEAN+3 Field Epidemiology Training Network (FETN) met recently to share each country's experiences with flooding and create an executive report for the ASEAN health ministers who will be gathered for an annual meeting in Phuket, Thailand in July.

Participants at the three-day workshop included epidemiologists from Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. The purpose of the workshop was to

learn about disasters in 2011 in various Southeast Asian countries and to share experiences and best practices on surveillance and response.

The workshop also focused on creating a manuscript and report for the ASEAN Health Ministers meeting scheduled for July. The report will provide guidance to the ministers on how to strengthen field epidemiology capacities in Southeast Asia.

*Learn more about FETN at:*

<http://www.aseanplus3fetr.net/>



*Participants at the opening ceremony of the seminar*

**Food for thought...Rhino Horn Powder (By Dr. Harold Varmus )**

I was recently amazed to learn that cancer patients in several parts of the world are willing to spend tens of thousands of dollars to treat their disease with a powder prepared from rhinoceros horns. As the Director of the US National Cancer Institute, I know how difficult it is to treat some cancer effectively -- even when we know about the damaged genes that drive the bad behavior of the cancer cells and even when we have a drug or an antibody that can block the bad genes. But for rhino horn powder, we have no rationale for its use and no evidence for any benefits.

So why would patients spend as much as \$50,000 to obtain this stuff? In part, because they are desperate for relief from an awful disease. In part, because they do not know that it is not going to help them. It is not just the price and the lack of effect that dismays me: some of the newer therapies for cancer can also cost this much, and they don't work for everyone who takes them. There is another disturbing factor about the horn powder: magnificent animals, whose numbers are dwindling, are cruelly and illegally destroyed by poachers to make it.

If I had advanced cancer, resistant to conventional treatments, I'd be taking my chances with the expensive new drugs that have a basis in science -- not with an equally expensive rhinoceros horn powder about which only one thing is certain: an extraordinary creature will have suffered and died to produce it.

—Dr. Harold Varmus, Director of the National Cancer Institute

For more information, visit the Rhino Conservation Blog at: <http://www.rhinoconservation.org/>

**HHS support results in international influenza vaccine milestone!**

**Clinical trial among first in the world for live attenuated influenza vaccine for avian influenza**

In June, Thailand became one of the first countries in the world to test an H5N1 avian, or bird, influenza vaccine in a needle-free, nasal spray formulation. This Phase I clinical trial of a live attenuated influenza vaccine, known as LAIV, to protect people from the H5N1 virus, resulted from international collaboration with health agencies around the world, including the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA). A Phase I clinical trial is the first step in testing new vaccines in humans.

The new vaccine developed and being tested in Thailand is part of the National Strategy Plan for Pandemic Preparedness that the Thai government released in 2005 in response to highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza outbreaks in Thailand. Avian influenza viruses such as H5N1 can be passed from infected birds to humans and hold potential to become a pandemic if the virus changes in a way that makes it spread easily among humans. The study and data analysis for this clinical trial are expected to be completed by May 2013.

*Learn more about this at:*

<http://www.phe.gov/Preparedness/news/Pages/international-flu-vaccine-120607.aspx>



## The Outlook for Medical Devices in Northeast Asia (By Reportlinker)

Business opportunities in Asian medical device equipment supply markets are very different from a few years ago. The traditional tiger economies, characterized by economic growth, free market environment, developed industry and investment in health and health infrastructure have

had a long haul back from the financial instability and economic downturn in the 1990's.

At the same time, markets that had hitherto excited little industry or investor interest, have emerged as real areas of opportunity for suppliers and service companies alike. Diverse influ-

ences – from deregulation and better trade links to improved access and the rise of medical tourism – are seeing markets such as Malaysia and Vietnam take an increasingly important role in the region.

Read more at: [http://www.healthcareglobal.com/press\\_releases/the-outlook-for-medical-devices-in-north-east-asia](http://www.healthcareglobal.com/press_releases/the-outlook-for-medical-devices-in-north-east-asia)



## NYBG SCIENTISTS IDENTIFY 81 NEW PLANT AND FUNGUS SPECIES (BY E! SCIENCE NEWS)

The palms that Vietnamese villagers weave into hats, many varieties of lichens that depend on the pristine environment of the Great Smoky Mountains, and small, shrub-like trees that are threatened by development and deforestation in Brazil were among the scores of plant and fun-

gus species that scientists at The New York Botanical Garden discovered and described in the course of one year. As part of their effort to catalog all plant life on Earth, Botanical Garden scientists named 81 new species of plants and fungi in 2011. They also established four

new genera and two new orders of plants and fungi. Genera and orders are groupings of related species.

Learn more at: <http://esciencenews.com/articles/2012/06/06/nybg.scientists.identify.81.new.plant.and.fungus.species>



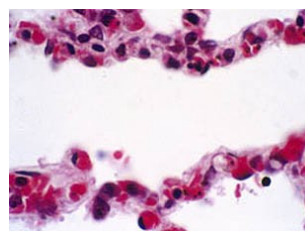
## ONE-THIRD OF MALARIA DRUGS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA ARE FAKE, STUDY (BY ASIAN SCIENTIST NEWSROOM)

Nearly 40 percent of the malaria drugs sold across Southeast Asia are either poor quality or fake, according to a National Institutes of Health (NIH) study published in *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* journal.

Poor quality anti-malarial drugs lead to drug resistance and inadequate treat-

ment in vulnerable populations, the authors say. They stress that the emergence of malaria strains that are resistant to artemisinin drugs on the Thailand-Cambodia border make it imperative to improve the drug supply.

Read more at: <http://www.asianscientist.com/topnews/fake-malaria-drugs-southeast-asia-nih-lancet-study-2012/>



## VIETNAM'S RAREST MONKEY

The Cat Ba langur (*Trachypithecus poliocephalus poliocephalus*), also known as Golden-headed langur, is endemic to the island of Cat Ba in Northern Vietnam. By the year 2000, poaching had reduced this species to only 53 individuals in several isolated sub-populations and the Cat Ba langur became listed by the IUCN, the World Conservation Union, as one of the world's most endangered primate species.



Photo from Catbalangur.org

Read more about the Cat Ba Langur at: <http://www.catbalangur.org/>

## THIS GREEN CAR 'CAN' GO FAR (BY THE STAR)

Yes, tin cans have been recycled for many uses but how about an ingenious plan to build a car with them? With its body made up of 400 flattened tin cans, the prototype car fits one adult driver and at RM 7,000, it is perhaps among the most cost-efficient cars to build.

The vehicle, designed by a team of students from Univer-

siti Putra Malaysia (UPM), is among 120 eco-friendly mobiles competing in the Shell Eco-Marathon Asia 2012 competition. UPM Green Blitz team manager Abdulrahman Yousif Abdullah, a fourth year mechanical engineering student, said the car had been tested on the road to make 200km on just one liter of fuel.



Read more at: <http://www.eco-business.com/news/this-green-car-%e2%80%98can-%e2%80%99-go-far/>



## Electricity Saving

By Green Living

Energy efficiency is the low hanging fruit of greenhouse gas reduction. By taking a little care with how we use electricity in our homes, we not only lighten the load on the environment, but we can save cash too.

In many parts of the world, the cost of electricity is rapidly increasing due to a variety of factors. One of the reasons is demand - as we acquire more power sucking gadgets and gizmos; this not only means more electricity needs to be generated, but additional infrastructure must be built for transmission and distribution.

Learn more about how you can reduce your costs at: <http://www.greenlivingtips.com/articles/334/1/Electricity-saving-tips.html>



To subscribe, unsubscribe, comment or submit ideas, please email [REOBangkok@state.gov](mailto:REOBangkok@state.gov)

## UNESCO-L'OREAL INTERNATIONAL FELLOWS PROGRAM FOR WOMEN IN LIFESCIENCES

Within the framework of the UNESCO Co-Sponsored Fellowships Scheme, a joint program has been launched with the L'ORÉAL Corporate Foundation with a view to promoting the contribution of young women - from all over the world - in research developments in the field of life sciences. Deadline—July 15th

For more information, visit:

[http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=44170&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=44170&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)



## Attention Wetland Researchers—Get Published!

ATTENTION WETLANDS SCIENTISTS AND RESEARCHERS! The U.S. Department of State, The National Wetlands Research Center (NWRC) of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), and the State Forestry Administration (SFA) of the Peoples Republic of China are collaborating with the premier international journal WETLANDS to publish a special issue on Asian Wetlands. Scientists and researchers working on wetlands in Asia are encouraged to submit their scientific papers for possible publication, deadline is September 1, 2012.

For more details on this announcement, visit:

[http://www.nwrc.usgs.gov/CallForPapersAsiaFlyerMar16-2012\\_final.pdf](http://www.nwrc.usgs.gov/CallForPapersAsiaFlyerMar16-2012_final.pdf)

## Launch of Southeast Asia Renewable Energy People's Assembly (SEAREPA)

The SEREPA Team invites you to participate in a forum taking place October 29—November 2, 2012, at the Rainforest Discover Center in Sabah, Malaysia. SEAREPA is a space for you to share and learn about energy issues among countries in the region: Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Brunei, Lao, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Burma, Timor Leste and Singapore. The event will be your opportunity to work with experienced renewable energy actors from diverse backgrounds. Bring your stories, struggles and solution to this event and join renewable energy engineers, impact investor, entrepreneurs, community leaders, policy advisors, as well as an online community in building the foundations for a strong Southeast Asian renewable energy network. This event will build strategic partnerships, disseminate new renewable technologies through discussion and hands-on workshops, and will open doors for technical advice and feedback from an international body of knowledge.

Learn more about this event by visiting:

<https://www.facebook.com/searepa> or <http://searepa.com/>



## Upcoming Events

July 13: Lower Mekong Initiative Ministerial Meeting—Phnom Penh, Cambodia  
July 16-17: Seminar on Ground Level Ozone Issues in Thailand—Bangkok, Thailand  
July 22-26: XIX International AIDS Conference—Washington D.C.  
July 23-30: Montreal Protocol Meetings—Bangkok, Thailand

## Upcoming Important Observance Days

July 28: World Hepatitis Day